



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT  
OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

## New Jersey Department of Children and Families Policy Manual

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Issuance	200	<b>Efforts to Place Siblings Together</b>	

### Efforts to Promote Placing Siblings Together 3-25-2002

The Division makes every effort to place siblings together when they:

- Enter placement at the same time or approximately the same time,
- Enter placement for the first time, or
- Are moving from an existing placement(s).

The Division makes every effort to reunite siblings promptly if they are separated, whether the separation is due to:

- A family's lack of resources, which prohibits the Division from placing the children together initially;
- Placement at different times or for different reasons; or
- Their respective behaviors at the time precluded their continued placement together.

Each individual circumstance is assessed for sibling reunification on a case by case basis.

For children who are separated from their siblings, the first and priority placement option is the foster home of the sibling.

Placing siblings together is psychologically beneficial to the children and may help their adjustment. In some circumstances, it can also facilitate permanency by affording the casework staff the advantage of utilizing the same family history and documentation to develop and carry out the case plan.

## **Exceptions to Sibling Placements**

**6-24-2002**

There are circumstances that may exist when it is not in the child's best interest to place him/her with a sibling. The Worker/Supervisor assess and discuss with the Casework Supervisor or LO Manager, as needed, the potential placement and the child's circumstances, prior to making a decision. They then determine whether placement with the sibling is in the child's best interests. Exceptions to placing siblings together include, but are not limited to:

- The capabilities of the potential caregiver in regard to the child needing placement;
- The safety and appropriateness of the home for the child needing placement; and
- The circumstances and/or needs of the child needing placement, i.e., the child is bonded to the caregiver in the current placement and adoption in that home is the goal, the case plan is return home or placement with a relative, etc.

Include any exceptions to placing a child in the home of a sibling on the foster home request form when requesting a foster home placement from the Local Office Resource Family Units.

See Determining Appropriateness of Sibling Placements When Foster Home Is at Capacity, below, and [CP&P-IV-B-7-325](#), the section entitled Consideration on Disrupting an Existing Placement in an Effort to Promote Sibling Placements.

## **Supports to Enable Foster Parents to Consider/Reconsider Accepting New Siblings**

**3-25-2002**

A caregiver's decision to not accept additional children into the home is influenced by a variety of factors that can change. It can change when the family's circumstances change -- for example, if the family moves, the residence becomes more accommodating to the family size, or other foster children leave the home. The family's relationship with the sibling may become more positive through visits or supports and services to meet the child's, the sibling's, and the family's needs. The Resource Family Support Unit (RFSU) Facilitator explores with the caregiver the reasons for a decision not to accept the sibling. In light of those factors and the child's needs, the Worker and/or RFSU Facilitator offers support services that might facilitate placement. Examples of such services include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Day Care or After School Care (if the caregiver is employed);
- Counseling (individual or group);

- Companionship services; and
- Preparation to receive the sibling, i.e., gradually increasing visitation between the child, sibling and family (when time constraints allow), and a discussion with the foster parents of the sibling's background, personality and special needs, if warranted.

In those cases where foster parents previously declined to take in a sibling, the RFSU Facilitator learns that the conditions upon which the decision was based have changed, and it is in the child's best interest, the RFSU Facilitator reapproaches the foster parents and offers them the opportunity to take the child. If the child is bonded to his or her current caregiver, the current caregiver wants to adopt the child, and the current caregiver and home are appropriate and are determined to be meeting all of the child's needs, moving the child to another home may not be in the child's best interest. The Worker discusses this situation in supervision and with appropriate Division management, as needed, in order to arrive at a casework determination of the best plan for the child. See [CP&P-IV-B-7-325](#), the section entitled Consideration on Disrupting an Existing Placement in an Effort to Promote Sibling Placements.

The RFSU Facilitator provides the following information, as necessary, so the foster parents can make an informed decision about whether or not to accept the sibling:

- Documentation of the sibling's improved behavior or changed condition;
- Implementation of intensive support services to stabilize the sibling; or
- Availability of support services for the family.

### **Efforts to Unite Siblings in the Same Placement**

**6-24-2002**

To ensure placing siblings together, whenever possible, the Local Office Resource Family Units and the Local Office (LO) responsible for placing the child follow certain procedures.

Foster parents are advised during the licensing/approval process and PRIDE training of the Division's policy on promoting sibling placements. Foster parents should request during the licensing/approval process or during their PRIDE training, through the Local Office Resource Family Units, any interest to have additional siblings placed in their home. The Worker forwards a request for a foster home to the Local Office Resource Family Unit every time a child needs placement. This includes children entering foster care for the first time, re-entering placement, or being moved from their current placement, i.e., if the current placement disrupts. The RFSU takes a foster parent's request for additional siblings into consideration when making placement decisions for a child.

Upon receiving a request for a foster home, and before making any placement decisions, the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator searches computer files to identify and locate any of the child's siblings who may be in a foster or adoptive placement. The Local Office Resource Family Facilitator documents any attempts, including searches of computer files, to locate siblings on a CP&P Form [26-52](#), Contact Sheet. The Local Office Resource Family Facilitator sends the original contact sheet to the Local Office for their review and filing in the case record of the child needing placement. File a copy of the contact sheet and the computer search printout in the Local Office Resource Family Unit's file.

If the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator locates a sibling in an open and active foster home that has current approval to accept placement of this type child, i.e., sex, age, etc., the RFSU Facilitator follows the usual placement procedures, unless the LO documented reasons that may warrant an exception to a sibling placement. See Exceptions to Sibling Placements. Notify the foster parents caring for the located sibling in writing, of the child needing placement, unless case practice implications warrant no contact. File a copy of the letter sent to the foster parents in the Local Office Resource Family Unit's file. Forward a copy of the letter to the LO for filing in the child's case record. See [CP&P-IV-B-2-100](#), Resource Home Selection. The Local Office Resource Family Facilitator notifies the LO of their recommendation for the sibling placement.

If the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator locates a sibling in an open and active foster home that has reached their approved capacity, and determines that the placement is appropriate, he/she must follow protocol for requesting an exception to population limitations. If the home is determined to be inappropriate, notify the foster parents in writing of the decision not to utilize the home, unless case practice implications warrant no contact or disclosure of information. File a copy of this letter in the Local Office Resource Family Unit's file. Forward a copy of this letter to the LO for filing in the child's case record. See the Criteria for Resource Home Selection section in [CP&P-IV-B-2-100](#) and, in this issuance, Determining Appropriateness of Sibling Placements When Foster Home is at Capacity.

If the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator locates a sibling in an adoptive placement, the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator notifies the LO and, if appropriate for the child needing placement (i.e., adoption is the goal and a history of prior Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) actions exist, the case is TPR ready or the biological parents are willing and able to sign a CP&P Form [14-86](#), Surrender of Custody and Consent to Adoption), the LO Worker arranges to conference the case with the appropriate LO office and to transfer the child's case to the ARC as soon as possible for further assessment of the child's potential placement in the sibling's adoptive home. See [CP&P-IV-C-1-500](#), Termination of Parental Rights (Guardianship), [CP&P-IV-C-10-100](#), Selection Consideration and Requirements.

Pending approval of the adoptive home placement and the ARC's assessment of the Division's ability to legally free the child for adoption (pre-adoptive approval pending TPR action or legal clearance via Surrenders), the Local Office Resource Family

Facilitator locates a foster home (possibly temporarily) for the child's placement prior to the child's case transfer to the ARC. For confidentiality purposes, under no circumstances does the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator or the LO staff contact the sibling's pre-adoptive or adoptive parents. Local Office Resource Family Unit and LO staff may contact active foster parents only.

If time constraints prevent completion of the search prior to locating a foster placement, the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator must complete the search process within 24 to 48 hours after the child's placement in the foster home. The Local Office Resource Family Facilitator documents his/her search efforts as described previously.

### **Search Process for Identifying a Sibling in Placement     6-24-2002**

For children entering foster care for the first time, re-entering placement, or being moved from their current placement, the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator:

- Accesses the Local Office Resource Family Unit's internal tracking system for homes not approved for additional siblings due to lack of adequate space, etc., to reconsider these homes in the event that circumstances have changed (usually determined as a result of the annual home visit); and
- Completes computer searches (by name, by address, "sounds like," etc.) to identify any siblings already in foster care or adoptive homes. See below for instructions on how to document search efforts. For ongoing cases, the Worker provides the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator with any new identifying information learned about the birth parent, such as a different surname due to marriage/civil union partnership, divorce/dissolution of civil union or aliases not already entered in NJS.

In addition to the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator's computer search for siblings when a child enters placement, replacement, or changes placements, the Worker and/or Supervisor completes the above search process at the time of the 45 day Child Placement Review and every five to six months thereafter during the Regional Review/Placement Conference and the Child Placement Review.

If the search reveals a sibling was adopted by selected adoptive parents or by foster parents who are no longer active, the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator notifies the LO. The LO follows the directives regarding transfer of the case as explained earlier in Efforts to Unite Siblings in the Same Placement.

### **Determining Appropriateness of Sibling Placements When Foster Home is at Capacity     8-30-2004**

If it is found that a sibling of a child awaiting placement is in an active and open foster home that has reached the approved capacity, the RFSU must follow protocol for

requesting an exception to population limitations. The Local Office Resource Family Unit supervising the foster home determines if the child awaiting placement can be placed with his/her sibling.

The Local Office Resource Family Facilitator:

- Consults with the Local Offices' Workers supervising the sibling and other children already placed in the home to assist with making a decision on whether the foster parent is capable of parenting another child. Assesses the home's safety and appropriateness for a sibling placement. Conducts a full review of the foster home record.
- Consults with the Office of Licensing (OOL) to determine if the foster home has any pending violations.
- Determines whether the foster parent is willing and able to accept the new sibling in their home. For the purpose of confidentiality, only the Local Office Resource Family Facilitator is authorized to make the initial contact with the foster parent (open and active foster homes only) in order to determine their interest in an additional sibling placement.
- Completes a written assessment on the family identified and being considered as caregiver for the new sibling. The assessment includes specific information about the caregiver's ability, willingness and capacity to parent the additional sibling, and how the other information obtained influenced the RFSU's decision to recommend the home for an exception to population limitations and for the child's placement. The assessment is specific concerning the needs and characteristics of all the children involved, states the benefits of placing the new sibling in the home, outlines the exceptional qualities this foster family possesses and the supports the family has to enable them to care for an additional sibling, and provides explicit detail about the supports needed to facilitate and maintain the placement. The RFSU Facilitator informs the Local Office of the potential approval of the placement, pending authorization of an exception to population limitations, and of any follow-up or contact the LO is responsible for.
- Refers the foster family case situation to the Assistant Director, Program Operations, overseeing the RFSU and the Chief, Office of Licensing, for approval of an exception to population limitations. See [CP&P-IV-B-2-100](#), sections entitled Population Limitations and Exceptions to Population Limitations.
- When requesting an exception to population limitations, the Local Office Resource Family Unit completes a New Jersey Child Safety Assessment (Resource Homes), CP&P Form [22-6](#), within three working days prior to

the exception being granted. See [CP&P-IV-A-2-100](#). The RFSU also provides a written assessment of the foster parents' ability to meet the physical and emotional needs of the child to be placed, in addition to the needs of the other children already in the home, as described in detail above.

The Assistant Director, Program Operations, overseeing the Local Office Resource Family Unit and the Chief, Office of Licensing, may jointly authorize a placement, for a specific child (sibling), which exceeds the population limitations only when compelling or exceptional circumstances exist, such as keeping a sibling group together.

Consideration is given to exceeding population limitations (authorizing an exception) only after the Assistant Director, Program Operations and Chief, Office of Licensing, review:

- The results of a New Jersey Child Safety Assessment (Resource Homes), CP&P Form [22-6](#), completed within the past three work days by staff of the RFSU (for a foster parent). An exception shall not be authorized if any safety concerns have been identified;
  - The results of a written redetermination by the Office of Licensing (OOL) that the foster home is large enough to accommodate the additional child beyond the population limitations, meets the standards concerning sleeping space, and is in substantial compliance with all other regulations concerning foster homes; and
  - The results of the assessment by the Local Office Resource Family Unit of the foster parents' ability and willingness to meet the physical and emotional needs of the child to be placed beyond the population limitations, as well as the other children already in the home, as described in detail previously.
- Notifies the Local Office of receipt of the authorization to exceed population limitations and the recommendation to place the child with the sibling. Files the written assessment and exception authorization in the foster home record maintained by the Local Office Resource Family Unit upon completion. Forwards a copy of the assessment and authorization to the LO to file in the child's case record. Forwards a copy of the assessment and exception authorization to the Office of Licensing (OOL) for their file.

## **Alternative, Emergency or Temporary Placement Considerations**

### **3-25-2002**

If the child must move to an alternative placement prior to the assessment of the sibling's foster home, an effort to consider placement of the child with his/her sibling begins immediately after the child is placed.

If a child is placed on an emergency basis and it is discovered after the placement that the child has a sibling in placement, an effort to consider placement of the child with his or her sibling in the foster home begins immediately.

During any interim placements, initiate or maintain visitation between siblings if appropriate. Document the reasons in the child's case record if it is determined that visitation is not appropriate.

If the RFSU locates a sibling in an adoptive placement and permanency through adoption is appropriate for the child needing placement, the RFSU Facilitator locates a foster home (possibly temporary) until the LO Worker conferences and transfers the case to the ARC. The Local Office supervising the sibling's adoptive home assesses the home for possible placement of the child. If approved, the Local Office supervising the child frees the child for adoption or obtains approval to place the child pending legal clearance, and prepares and moves the child.

Under any of the above circumstances, inform the temporary foster parents of the Division's efforts and intentions to assess and possibly approve the child's eventual placement with a sibling.

If the sibling's foster parent is not interested in a second sibling, but the "temporary" foster parent is interested in both siblings, assess for possible reunification in the second sibling's home. See [CP&P-IV-B-7-325](#), the section entitled Consideration on Disrupting an Existing Placement in an Effort to Promote Sibling Placements.

See [CP&P-IV-A-4-100](#), Preparations for Placement.

## **Internal Tracking of Sibling Placements**

**6-24-2002**

The Local Office Resource Family Units establish a mechanism for tracking/reviewing all cases in or between their respective offices in which the Local Office Resource Family Units are unable to facilitate sibling placements and the reasons why, so the issues that prevent sibling placements can be addressed. The Local Office Resource Family Facilitators indicate in the comments section of the foster home request form, after completing a search for siblings, whether or not siblings were located and placement in the sibling's foster home considered. Homes not approved for sibling placements due to lack of space are duly noted, i.e., tagged, underscored, marked with

an asterisk, etc. Reconsider these homes for future sibling placements if the circumstances change.

As soon as possible, identify and notify the appropriate Division Assistant Director's office of any cases in which sibling placements were unable to be completed and why.

Each Local Office Resource Family Unit is responsible for devising an internal monitoring system to document the need for additional foster homes that are specifically studied and approved to take siblings.

### **Procedures for Promoting Sibling Placements**

**8-30-2004**

<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b>	<b>ACTION TAKEN</b>
LO Worker	1. Forward the request for a foster home to the Resource Family Support Unit for children entering foster care for the first time, re-entering placement, or being moved from their current placement. Include a statement requesting a search for siblings already in foster or adoptive placement, if not already completed. Document any reasons that may warrant and exception to a sibling placement.
	2. Document in NJS, on a CP&P Form <a href="#">26-52</a> , Contact Sheet, any attempts, including computer searches, to locate siblings. Send the original Contact Sheet to the Local Office for their review and filing in the case record of the child needing placement. File a copy of the Contact Sheet and the computer search printout in the RFSU file.
	3. Notify the LO if a sibling is located In an adoptive placement. Do not contact the sibling's adoptive parents under any circumstances. If a sibling is located in a open

	<p>and active foster home, notify the foster parents in writing of the child needing placement, unless case practice implications warrant no contact. File a copy of the letter in the RFSU file. Forward a copy of the letter to the LO for filing in the child's case record. Only contact active foster parents.</p>
LO Worker	<p>4. Complete the search at the time of the 45 day Child Placement Review and every five to six months thereafter during the Regional Review/Placement Conference and the Child Placement Review. Document search efforts as described previously.</p>
Resource Family Support Unit	<p>5. Determine if placement is suitable for the child, if sibling is located in an open and active foster home that has current approval for placement of an additional child, unless the LO documented reasons that may warrant an exception to a sibling placement. If the sibling's home is determined inappropriate, notify the foster parents in writing of the decision not to utilize the home, unless case practice implications warrant no contact or disclosure of information. File a copy of this letter in the RFSU file. Forward a copy of this letter to the LO for filing in the child's case record. Notify the LO of the recommendation for placement.</p>
	<p>6. Consult each Local Office Worker supervising the sibling and other children already in placement in the home, if the foster home is open and active, but is at capacity and an exception to population limitations is</p>

	needed. Assess the home's safety and appropriateness for a sibling placement.
	7. Consult with OOL to determine if the foster home has any pending violations.
	8. Contact the foster parent to determine their interest and ability in caring for a sibling. Document this contact in the RFSU file and forward a copy of the documented contact to the LO for filing in child's case record.
	9. Complete a written assessment of the foster parents' ability, willingness, and capacity to meet the physical and emotional needs of the child to be placed and of the other children already in the home, if requesting an exception to population limitations.
	10. Inform the LO of the plan to recommend the foster home as a placement option, pending authorization of an exception to population limitations. Inform the LO of any follow-up or contact they will be responsible for.
	11. Refer the foster home to the Assistant Director, Program Operations, overseeing the appropriate RFSU and the Chief, Office of Licensing, for an exception, if the foster parent has reached their population limitations and a compelling or exceptional circumstance exists that warrants the placement, i.e., placing siblings together.
	12. Complete a New Jersey Child

	Safety Assessment (Resource Homes), CP&P Form <a href="#">22-6</a> , within three work days prior to exception being granted. See <a href="#">CP&amp;P-IV-A-2-100</a> .
Office of Licensing	13. Conduct a redetermination to establish whether or not the foster home is large enough for another child, meets sleeping space standards and is in compliance with all other regulations concerning foster homes, if an exception is requested.
Asst. Dir., Program Operations Chief of Office of Licensing	14. Review results of the New Jersey Child Safety Assessment (Resource Homes), CP&P Form <a href="#">22-6</a> , completed by RFSU, the Office of Licensing's redetermination of the foster home, and the RFSU's assessment of the foster parents' ability to meet the child's needs, if an exception to the population limitations has been requested. Authorize an exception to population limitations if all qualifications are met.
Resource Family Support Unit	15. Forward a copy of the assessment and the authorization for an exception (if applicable) to the LO for filing in the child's case record, and to OOL. File a copy in the foster home record.
LO Worker	16. File the assessment and the exception (if applicable) in the child's case record.
	17. Follow policy and procedures for placing the child in a foster home as described in <a href="#">CP&amp;P-IV-A-4-100</a> , Preparations for Placement.
Resource Family Support Unit	18. Indicate in the comments section of

	the foster home request form, after completing a search for siblings, whether or not siblings were located and placement in the sibling's foster home considered.
	19. As soon as possible, identify and notify the appropriate Assistant Director, Program Operations office of any cases in which sibling placements were unable to occur and why.
	20. Develop and maintain a mechanism for tracking/reviewing all cases in which the RFSU is unable to facilitate sibling placements and the reasons why. Make special note of placements that are not approved due to lack of space. Reconsider these homes for future sibling placements if circumstances change.